

# Special Operations Doctrine

## Is it Needed?

BY CHARLES T. CLEVELAND, JAMES B. LINDER, AND RONALD DEMPSEY

### Reflections of a Special Operator in Afghanistan

**O**n a cool, crisp morning in early April 2012, American and Afghan special forces struggled up the steep and rugged slopes of Maholic Mountain.<sup>1</sup> The mountain overshadows the former home of the deceased Taliban leader Mullah Omar on the northern outskirts of Kandahar City, Afghanistan. This band of men completed the challenging ritual each week as a way of building camaraderie while not out on missions. Upon reaching the top of the mountain, one can view the humidity rising off the ground in the distance creating a mirage-like effect. Looking further out, one can see Kandahar City with its vast collection of mud huts (*qalats*), strip malls, mosques, and two and three story buildings. Resting on top of a boulder, with a bead of sweat running down the side of his head, one special forces soldier sipped coffee from his thermos as he reflected on a recent experience in Northern Kandahar.

The special forces soldier began to relive an improvised explosive device (IED) attack three days earlier in which an Afghan District Chief of Police's vehicle was hit. The vehicle, an unarmored Toyota Hilux 4x4 pick-up truck, was ripped in half. Metal shards were scattered hundreds of meters away and a 3-foot deep crater was gouged into the ground. Two of the four Afghan National Police officers riding with the Chief that day were instantly killed. A group of American and Afghan National Army special forces soldiers dismounted their vehicles to secure the area and help render first aid. In the chaos of the situation, the District Police Chief was evacuated to a primary care medical treatment facility where he received treatment for his injuries, and returned

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to his security duties a month later at the same district center.

The special forces soldier sitting on the top of Maholic Mountain had been in close calls before; intense fire fights, rocket and mortar attacks, IED attacks, and brutal hand-to-hand combat, but none of that mattered to him now. While reflecting on the recent IED attack, he began to see the bigger picture. Why was it so important to run across an uncleared field under enemy fire to save the District Police Chief or any other Afghan security forces when a vehicle was just ripped in half by an IED? The District Police Chief was a charismatic leader who appealed to and united the different Afghan tribes in the district despite their tribal dynamics. He was an integral element of a critical Village Stability Operations (VSO) plan crafted by the Special Forces Advanced Operating Base (AOB), eight Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alphas (SFODAs)<sup>2</sup>, and Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations teams working alongside two battlespace owners, the interagency, and Afghan National Security Forces in Kandahar Province. The goal of the VSO program was to promote governance, security, and development from the bottom up, starting at the village level, with the ultimate goal of defeating the Taliban insurgency and legitimizing the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA).

Looking back to 2002, *Operation Enduring Freedom II*, it was unnatural for special operations forces (SOF) and conventional forces (CF) to integrate and mutually support each other's operations. Special forces and other government agencies had proven a powerful team at the beginning of the Afghan conflict. Less smooth were the initial relations between SOF, particularly special forces, and

conventional forces when they were introduced to consolidate the gains following the overthrow of the Taliban. Today conventional units provide platoons to assist SFODAs with security while the special operators deliver timely and accurate information, local situational understanding, and access. The AOB coordinates significant key leader engagements with village tribal leaders while conventional forces facilitate Afghan provincial and district governance participation. Conditions have improved in Kandahar Province and violence has decreased to the point that Kandahar City has begun to provide basic services such as trash pickup. The Taliban's ability to hold sway over the populace and to undermine GIRoA has been marginalized. People have started to believe in the legitimacy of GIRoA and the security forces in many places once under Taliban influence.

In his final sip of coffee before descending down the mountain, the U.S. special forces soldier wondered, how do we avoid having to relearn the same hard lessons in the next low-grade war?—a thought shared by many seasoned veterans who served repetitive tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. Over 10 years into the long war, the U.S. Army published Army Doctrine Publication 3-05, its first ever attempt at Special Operations doctrine. Sixty years after the Army's first special operations units were formed, the time had arrived for writing how Army special operations contributes to achieving the military objective assigned to it.

### Change

In August 2012 the United States Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), at the urging of the then Commanding General of the Army's John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, Major General Bennet

Sacolick, commissioned Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-05, "Special Operations." This was in response to SOF's undeniable contributions to the long war and the need to update its doctrine in the face of a decade of war. In addition to Civil Affairs, Psychological Operations, and Special Forces, the effort integrated the roles and missions of the Ranger Regiment, Special Mission Units, and the U.S. Army Special Operations Aviation Command, providing the Army and Special Operations Command (SOCOM) with a first attempt at a comprehensive Army Special Operations doctrine.

This article reviews the effectiveness of the doctrine four years later, by examining why it took 60 years, why the doctrine proved necessary, why the Army needed the parent command, United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), to ensure proper concept integration among all Army SOF, and what thinking and organizational gaps remain. ADP 3-05 clarified the conceptual framework for Army SOF. Generally, SOF organizes around two fundamentally distinct requirements; the first includes forces for short notice raids anywhere on the globe to execute kill/capture operations, hostage rescue, or to secure material or facilities designated by national leadership. Dubbed "surgical strike" these operations are largely unilateral, conducted typically with little notice, and attempt to reduce uncertainty through robust full spectrum intelligence collection before execution. The second special operations requirement, special warfare, focuses support to host nation forces and nonstate actors whose military purposes align with those of the United States. Special warfare—which includes missions from Foreign Internal Defense (FID) to Unconventional Warfare—has become

increasingly important around the globe as the United States seeks and supports growing numbers of countries fighting against terrorist and insurgents. The principal maneuver force for special warfare is the U.S. Army's Special Forces, capably augmented in FID operations by the U.S. Marine Corps special operations teams, with indispensable enabler support provided principally by U.S. Army Special Operations, Psychological Operations, and Civil Affairs teams.

The purpose of the doctrine is to address gaps in thinking and organization for persistent conflicts that focus on the human domain and increasingly take place in the "Gray Zone" of the conflict continuum—that uncertain space between peace and war.<sup>3</sup> It has been four years since ADP 3-05 was published and an evaluation of its role in shaping subsequent doctrine, organization, training, leadership and education, personnel, and policy demonstrates its importance and the positive effect it has had on the SOF enterprise. Specifically, Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) has enhanced its ability to plan, prepare, and execute its core operations and activities to defeat the threat and win in today's complex environment. Furthermore, special operations doctrine has made a substantial impact on the larger Joint Force, the interagency, and policymakers by educating these practitioners about SOF capabilities and why the "Gray Zone," persistent nature of many contemporary conflicts is best met with a precise balance of CF and SOF. ADP 3-05 helped pave the way for emerging joint doctrine in the soon to be published Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning, and the Joint Concept on Human Aspects of Military Operations. Even with all the progress and forward momentum the doctrine facilitated, there remain gaps both

in thinking and organization relevant to persistent conflicts. There is a need for a new appreciation and recognition of special warfare as a primary pillar in our national defense policy as the country returns to rebuilding its political warfare expertise. The recent emphasis on Irregular Warfare, the confirmation of special operations as an Army core competency, and the acceptance of the U.S. Army Functional Concept for Engagement are several efforts within the Army that illuminate the need for a new appreciation and recognition of special warfare as a primary pillar in our national defense policy and approaches. Recently, several initiatives emerged to satisfy this need for a new appreciation. Project Gray is an example of an initiative of the U.S. Army Special Operations Center of Excellence in cooperation with National Defense University to promote conversation through a series of publications, forums, and events with academic, government, and military partners and other interested parties on how we think and talk about the Gray Zone.<sup>4</sup>

### Causes and Symptoms

The first cause to highlight is the United States military's failure to capture best practices and lessons learned from past irregular conflicts related to CF-SOF and SOF-civilian agency interoperability. Today's military, despite the best efforts at jointness and Goldwater-Nichols, relearns hard lessons every time "civil-joint-combined" action is required. The process for planning and execution of complex, irregular warfare efforts remains largely ad hoc 30 years after the organizational reforms of the 1980s. This discovery learning makes unity of effort between CF, SOF, and the interagency elusive with one significant effect being each develops an independent one-dimensional

view of the environment. This is particularly apparent outside the Afghan and Iraq combat zones, where the United States and its allies and friends are attempting to stem the rise of transregional violent extremist organizations. Doctrine must drive us to value the criticality of the joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) construct in campaign design and execution.

Both Sun Tsu and Clausewitz teach us that we have to know ourselves and our adversary, as well as the kind of war we are about to wage. Arguably, we may have failed at times on all three points. In Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere around the world in the war on terror, and most recently in Ukraine, Libya and Yemen, the battlefield quickly told us that what the U.S. brought to those fights was not sufficient. For example, the rapid adoption of new structures, Special Operations Command (Forward), Provisional Reconstruction Teams, and the Asymmetric Warfare Group were a testament to adaptability in response to nonconventional enemies. But the need to create such critical components during the fight begged the question, does the United States have a coherent vision of warfare and a meaningful description of what that vision means for how the U.S. fights? The question looks increasingly relevant when we consider what it will take to win against violent extremist organizations like ISIL or al-Qaeda, or to counter Russia's "New Generation Warfare," China's three types of warfare, or Iran's deft use of surrogates, such as Lebanese Hezbollah.

Secondly, aside from a lack of interoperability prior to September 11, 2001, the general military doctrine community held a myopic view of U.S. special operations capabilities. SOF was incorrectly viewed only as a supporting enabler to conventional forces. Campaigns

were the purview of either Corps or higher headquarters, or in the joint world, the Combatant Commanders, or when committed to traditional military action, the Joint Task Force (JTF). The five-phase model (as outlined in Joint Publications 3-0, Joint Operations and 5-0, Joint Operation Planning) accounted for SOF as either knitting indigenous assets to the JTF or for the conduct of direct action (raids). This changed slowly, at first after Vietnam, then with each U.S. military venture abroad since, culminating more rapidly with the post 9/11 Global War on Terror and the recent recognition of formidable irregular and unconventional threats from increasingly belligerent nation states.

The hostage rescue mission became politically relevant in the 1980s and spawned a cottage industry that today has become the world's foremost surgical strike capability. Early on these dedicated strike forces were rightly harbored as strategic assets, to be used when needed and otherwise set aside for emergencies. That was to change significantly after 9/11 when policy called for proactive measures

against threats against the homeland. The cottage industry grew to an industrial scale. Special operations raids, essentially "hyperconventional" operations companioned with drone-assisted strike operations, became popularly seen as the new 21<sup>st</sup> century American way of war. These select units set aside two decades earlier for hostage rescue, despite their growing prominence and broader mission sets in Iraq and Afghanistan, are still viewed in this way. To the general public, many civilian leaders in the executive and legislative branches, and even most in uniform, this singular surgical strike SOF narrative came to be what SOF was known for. Hollywood reinforced this impression, and given the lack of education on SOF at the service professional development schools, there was little to counter a lopsided view of SOF.

From the 1950s through the 1970s, SOF placed significant value on the combination of strong light infantry skills, intelligence tradecraft, a deep understanding of culture and foreign languages, the development and employment of surrogate forces, the conduct



Specialist Justin Young, U.S. Army

**Coalition security forces conduct a surgical strike raid on rooms housing Taliban operatives.**

and orchestration of sabotage and subversion, and the use of Psychological Operations. These are essentially the elements of unconventional warfare (UW) and its form in permissive environments, FID. However, the rising threat from Communist, anarchist, and religious extremist groups using terror to promote their aims gave rise to a different sort of SOF formation, and the earlier skills became overshadowed by perceived quick fixes through surgical strike actions. This view was reinforced at the time by leaders who put Vietnam in the “never to be repeated” past. UW skills lost favor and the mission itself was regarded as no longer a military requirement, belonging instead to civilian intelligence.

Though the limits of surgical strike operations on their own are well understood by special operations planners, they are becoming increasingly evident to policy makers and strategists as well because the character of war is changing. While we must have the most dominating and lethal Joint Combined Arms Maneuver (JCAM) capability in the world with an Army to deter and defeat any foe, the sophisticated nature of the battlefield of tomorrow will demand options beyond just JCAM. Consequently, the more effective U.S. military JCAM capabilities and deterrence, the more likely our enemies will avoid opening the pandora’s box of U.S. lethality, and the more likely they will fight us in the uncertainty of the Gray Zone.

In search of solutions short of the commitment of large U.S. conventional forces there is growing reliance on the indigenous-centered warfighting side of SOF, special warfare, and the work of specially organized conventional assets. SOF is desirable for their low visibility, low cost and moderate risk; this approach has proven successful in places like

Colombia and the Philippines, and even in Iraq and Afghanistan it has resulted in those two countries’ most effective warfighting formations. However, this approach takes longer and thus opens U.S. political and military leadership to criticism. Problems are inevitable as well because in these cases the U.S. essentially does not “own” the campaign. Instead, partner nations provide the mass, much of the fires, and some of their own logistics and intelligence for these efforts. The goal is to achieve the political objectives of our allies with them doing most of the fighting for their cause and in doing so gaining an acceptable outcome for the U.S. The key lesson from 15 years of this long war is that any permanent solutions have to be indigenous, particularly if the U.S. finds itself lacking the will, money, or domestic political support to secure a win unilaterally. ADP 3-05 provides not only a better understanding of the two halves of SOF, Special Warfare and surgical strike, but also the benefit of properly blending them alongside conventional and interagency efforts for collaborative effects.

The third challenge to getting SOF doctrine accepted is the lack of a model that adequately accounts for the centrality of the human element in today’s warfighting. Consistently unsatisfying results from U.S. military campaigns from Vietnam to the present point to something fundamentally wrong with the model used by the U.S. security establishment not only in analyzing threats but also developing concepts in response. USASOC posited in their 2012 “ARSOF 2022” strategic plan the emergence of a human domain of warfare. Using as a model the example of the ultimate recognition of the air domain that ultimately led to the separation of the Air Force from the Army in 1947, USASOC

claimed the human domain emerged primarily because conventional tools (hence responses) built for the other domains had diminishing utility in securing U.S. policy objectives in an increasing number of contemporary situations. International norms brought on by globalization and technology have rendered problematic the traditional use of military force against many of today's adversaries. U.S. enemies, state and nonstate, are adeptly avoiding U.S. strengths, and resorting to the timeless ways the weak have fought the strong, through insurrection, revolution, and rebellion, using the tactic of terror to full effect in the age of hyper connected social media.

While ADP 3-05 does not specifically mention the human domain, it does describe the domain and make the case that SOF is a primary maneuver force. The human domain model has subsequently been adopted for further study by SOCOM, which by extension is the owner of the human domain. While the model remains under discussion there has been an oblique nod for its utility from the Joint Staff with the ongoing development of the Joint Concept for Human Aspects of

Military Operations. More needs to be done, particularly at the headquarters and institutional levels, but it is a start.

### The Solution: ARSOF Doctrine

ARSOF wrote ADP 3-05 in an effort to better inform military leaders about how their core operations and activities, namely unconventional warfare, fit into the Army's core competencies. ADP 3-05 provides an overview of Special Operations, Core Operations and Activities, and Command Structure. It explains special operations in a nuanced approach through the elements of combat power. Perhaps, the most vital aspect of ADP 3-05 is the framing of two critical capabilities: special warfare and surgical strike. The two terms describe what ARSOF provides to the Joint Force and the Interagency. Clearly defining these two capabilities helps.

In simple terms, surgical strike is fundamentally the hyper-conventional raid, and special warfare is indigenous-centric warfighting. Each has its own distinct operational application. SOF operational art is the proper blending of the special warfare and surgical strike



Special operations core operations and activities<sup>6</sup>

capabilities to achieve operational effects. They are fundamentally different, but mutually support one another, and the nation needs a world class capability in both.

Special warfare is the execution of activities that involve a combination of lethal and nonlethal actions taken by a specially trained and educated force with a deep understanding of cultures and foreign language, proficiency in small-unit tactics, and the ability to build and fight alongside indigenous combat formations in a permissive, uncertain, or hostile environment.<sup>7</sup> Special warfare provides the United States with an alternative to unilateral counterterrorism efforts that typically produce limited long-term effects and potential political risk. Some of the characteristics associated with special warfare include agile, scalable, and flexible formations capable of independently waging campaigns in support of small conflicts or wars. The risk level is palatable to decision-makers because of the low visibility and smaller footprint, particularly appealing in a fiscally constrained environment. Lastly, special warfare enables regional partners through development of their security capabilities, creating a strategic reserve similar to what Henry Kissinger presented in his Foreign Affairs essay in 1954 on *Military Policy and Defense of the "Grey Areas."*<sup>8</sup>

Surgical strike is the execution of precise activities that employ SOF in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments to seize, destroy, capture, exploit, recover, or damage designated targets, or influence threats.<sup>9</sup> These activities provide decisionmakers a sophisticated range of options in support of regional and national objectives while strictly adhering to the principles of joint operations outlined in Joint Publication 3-0: Joint Operations. Surgical strike provides a scalable direct action

capability employed in counterterrorism, counterproliferation, hostage rescue, kill/capture operations against designated targets, and other specialized tasks of strategic importance.<sup>10</sup> This critical capability engages global targets discriminately and precisely based on a high level of certainty versus special warfare where the threat can be far more ambiguous.

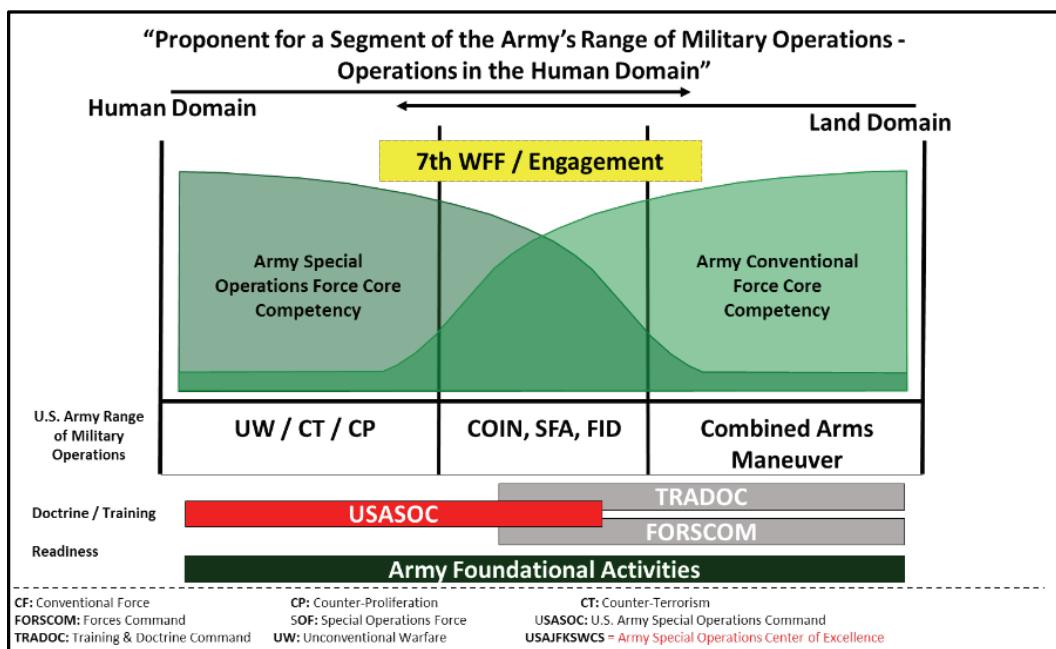
Another key aspect of ADP 3-05 recognizes that a portion of the range of military operations is uniquely SOF's, particularly ARSOF's. Unconventional warfare, counterterrorism, and counter-proliferation fall within the ARSOF core competency and emphasize the human domain: "...the totality of the physical, cultural, psychological, and social environments that influence human behavior to the extent that the success of any military operation or campaign depends on the application of unique capabilities that are designed to influence, fight, and win in population-centric conflicts."<sup>11</sup> SOF, particularly United States Army Civil Affairs, Psychological Operations, and Special Forces, have a deep understanding of the human domain and, therefore, are best suited to be the maneuver arm for population-centric operations. In an increasingly flat world where the velocity of human interaction is rising exponentially on a global scale, it is the human domain that, if ignored, will allow our adversaries to exploit the United States and its global network of partners. Together, the land and human domains comprise strategic landpower, a concept which serves to institutionalize CF-SOF interoperability in order to facilitate better understanding and synchronization of capabilities between the Army and SOF, maximizing the complementary and reinforcing effects of both through unified land operations.

## Evaluating the Effects of the ARSOF Solution

Special Operations Doctrine is making a difference by helping the Army and the Joint Force Commanders achieve their objectives while providing policymakers realistic and feasible options. A quick examination of ongoing operations in Iraq combating ISIL strongly supports the claim that special operations are having measurable impact. In response to ISIL seizing Mosul and Tikrit in June 2014, SOF began surgical strike operations in August 2014, with special warfare operations starting in January 2015. Together, these efforts altered ISIL's intended trajectory for establishing an exclusive Sunni caliphate.<sup>13</sup> In an August 2015 press briefing, then Army Chief of Staff General Raymond Odierno stated, "ISIL has been blunted somewhat. We're kind of at a stalemate. It's important we continue to support them [the Kurds]... and continue to

retrain the Iraqi Security Forces to build up the capabilities, so they can conduct operations."<sup>14</sup> More recently, Deputy Secretary of State Anthony Blinken in a July 5, 2016 interview indicated that ISIL's indiscriminate terror attacks are actually a measure of success for the United States and its partners. Blinken stated, "What we're seeing, I think, is ISIS actually lashing out because against every way we measure this—the territory they control, the number of foreign fighters and fighters overall, the money, the propaganda—they are down against every single measure."<sup>15</sup>

These effects and successes demonstrate the effective application of SOF operational art as a fiscally and politically sustainable strategic tool, in which special warfare and surgical strike capabilities are properly blended, achieve operational effects, and meet the U.S. policy objective of maintaining Iraqi sovereignty, while managing escalation and credibility risk. Further, analysis of the threat trends



Land Domain + Human Domain = Strategic Landpower<sup>12</sup>

in tactics indicates that ISIL has changed its strategic approach as the result of ongoing operations targeting the group's leadership, foreign fighters, its money, and propaganda. This provides evidence that the formulation of SOF strategy, operational plans, and tactical actions in Iraq required a fuller understanding of the human domain—on winning the contest of wills. The ongoing operations in Iraq demonstrate how special operations doctrine is making a difference—ARSOF's capabilities, deep study of the human domain, and specialized skill sets are built to increase decision space, to influence trajectories of emerging threats, and to provide expanded sustainable strategic options. These effects and successes demonstrate the effective application of SOF operational art as a fiscally and politically sustainable strategic tool, in which special warfare and surgical strike capabilities are properly blended, achieve operational effects, and meet the U.S. policy objective of maintaining Iraqi sovereignty, while managing escalation and credibility risk. Further, analysis of the threat trends indicates that ISIL has changed its strategic approach as the result of ongoing operations targeting the group's leadership, foreign fighters, its money, and propaganda. This provides evidence that the formulation of SOF strategy, operational plans, and tactical actions in Iraq required a fuller understanding of the human domain. The ongoing operations in Iraq demonstrate how Special Operations Doctrine is making a difference—ARSOF's capabilities, deep study of the human domain, and specialized skill sets are built to increase decision space, to influence trajectories of emerging threats, and to provide expanded sustainable strategic options. Special Operations Doctrine in this case provided a framework for senior leaders to make

informed decisions on what SOF brings to the problem set and how to best employ and synchronize Special Warfare and Surgical Strike capabilities to produce effects. Understanding the culture, complex social networks, and possessing an ability to build and fight alongside indigenous combat formations in uncertain and hostile environments in Iraq demonstrates the effect of deep study of the human domain—on winning the contest of wills and defeating the threat as indicated by Deputy Secretary of State Anthony Blinken above.

ADP 3-05 was the first step in answering the ARSOF crisis of identity fueled by lack of understanding of who ARSOF is, what the force does, and the full range of options and capabilities that ARSOF provides the nation. ADP 3-05 provides a common frame of reference and a cultural perspective. Supporting this is TRADOC's, "The U.S. Army Operating Concept, Win in a Complex World," released in October 2014. The document specifies special operations as one of seven principal Army Core Competencies constituting our Army's strengths and strategic advantages, while providing a focus for leader development, force design, and training.

The doctrine provides an ARSOF perspective on the operational environment and the nature of the threat that emphasizes population-centric environments in the human domain. This thinking is growing and gaining momentum as evidenced in key developments such as TRADOC identifying the development of situational awareness as the Army's number one warfighting challenge.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, the U.S. Army Intelligence Center of Excellence, U.S. Army Special Operations Center of Excellence, and select collaborators are developing solutions to integrate collection, analysis, and warning intelligence from the Gray

Zone to achieve situational understanding in current and future operational environments.

The SOF community embraced ARSOF doctrine operationally and institutionally through the implementation of ARSOF 2022, a three-part series that was published in the *Special Warfare* magazine.<sup>17</sup> The series outlined six priorities, broken down into lines of effort to reflect command emphasis on the most critical aspects of ARSOF, including implementing doctrine, providing strategic direction to address the gaps and seams, and refocusing future force development. Organizationally, USASOC realigned its subordinate regimental headquarters to form the 1<sup>st</sup> Special Forces Command (Airborne) in support of planning, preparing, and executing its special warfare capabilities. 1<sup>st</sup> Special Forces Command (Airborne) organizes, trains, equips, validates, and deploys regional experts in support of Theater Special Operations Commands, Joint Force Commanders, U.S. Ambassadors, and other government agencies as directed.<sup>18</sup>

On November 30, 2011, then Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, General Peter W. Chiarelli, designated the United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (USAJFKSWCS) as the United States Army Special Operations Center of Excellence (SOCoE). This action institutionalized cooperation between the SCoE, the United States Army Combined Arms Center, TRADOC Centers of Excellence, and the Army Capabilities Integration Center (ARCIC), and expands special operations and conventional force interdependence in the institutional Army. The SCoE functions as an agent of change by organizing and developing ARSOF's special warfare capability and addressing the gaps and seams by developing capacity through training and education, force

development, and connected experimentation with SOCOM.

ARSOF doctrine and its practitioners are primary contributors in a community of interest focused on spurring conversation about warfare, conducting warfare experimentation (wargaming exercises), and influencing Joint Doctrine around anticipating the emerging operational environment and evolving unified land operations. Future American military and civilian leaders must visualize the future environment, interoperability, and threats influenced by variables and megatrends that constantly change the strategic landscape. Drilling down deeper, the United States and its partners' response to those threats will increasingly occur in the Gray Zone.

These Gray Zone challenges, as many senior military leaders, analysts, practitioners, and scholars describe, require constant adaptation, innovation, and institutional agility.<sup>19</sup> It takes a comprehensive look at the future environment to discern what capabilities are required to address Gray Zone adversaries and hybrid threats of the future. ARSOF doctrine strategically communicates the efficacy of SOF capabilities through the promulgation of special warfare and surgical strike as viable solutions to campaign design and CF-SOF interoperability.

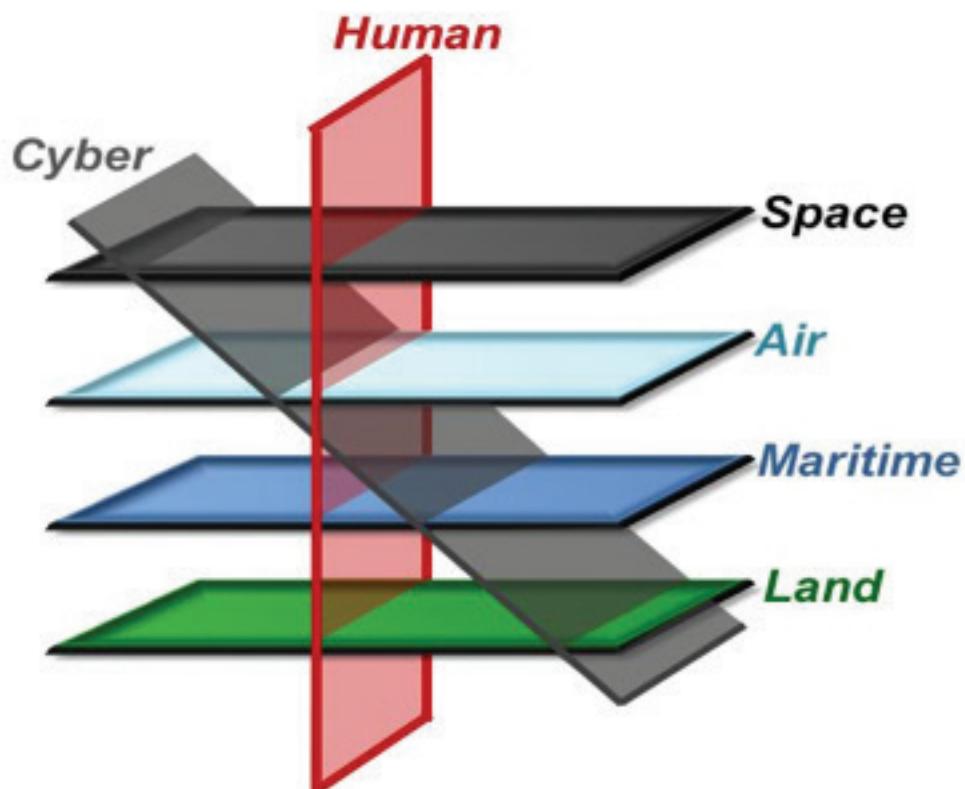
## Way Ahead

As the United States military evolves and adapts to complex environments and uncertain futures, Joint Force Commanders (JFC) should expect CF and SOF tactical and operational forces, organizations, and capabilities to generally function as they were designed. While challenges still remain, integrating CF and SOF in the same environment is an option for the JFC to exploit. The JFC must realize

SOF is not a substitute for CF. Rather, it is a necessary adjunct to the capabilities of existing CF.

Special Operations doctrine is making a difference, but there are gaps in thinking and organization that remain relevant to persistent conflicts. At the senior levels in the United States government, special warfare must be considered as a primary pillar in national defense policy alongside surgical strike. Revisions to Title X and Department of Defense Instruction 5100.01, "Functions of the Department of Defense and Its Major Components," (2010) are required to illuminate special warfare and distinguish it from surgical strike capabilities. Future versions

should highlight the characteristics associated with special warfare: agile, scalable, and flexible formations capable of independently waging campaigns in support in small conflicts and/or wars. There are also still gaps in doctrine, specifically with regard to leader development and recognizing and defining the human domain. The United States military must invest in formulating doctrine and strategy which fundamentally change how we execute leader development across the joint force, fully embrace and master the nuances of the human domain, and facilitate interoperability at all levels to complement and enhance conventional forces and SOF capabilities to



Cross Domain Synergy: Campaign planners can understand the complex environment by considering each domain and its effects on others.<sup>20</sup>

effectively address Gray Zone challenges and hybrid threats.

### **Leader Development**

The military must invest in leader development across all the services that educates and informs tactical and operational leaders on the complementary efforts of CF and SOF, and emphasizes an informed approach to achieve collaborative effects. Leader development is essential to cultivating competent and adaptive leaders as creative and critical thinkers who are multidimensional problem solvers. It creates leaders that are capable of understanding the past and current decisionmaking and behavior of friendly, neutral, and adversarial actors, and enables them to be successful and effective across the full spectrum of operations from the tactical to strategic levels. The SOF cells in the Army's Centers of Excellence are an example of a step in the right direction to integrate ARSOF Professional Military Education (PME) and ADP 3.05 into the different CoE branches and Warfighting Functions programs of instruction.

### **Conflict Continuum**

To maximize efficacy of special operations capabilities, further changes must be made to doctrine addressing current training, and education for campaign planning must recognize the importance of the joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational environments. This will mitigate seams exploited by our adversaries. An evolved conflict continuum highlights the necessity to operate in the human domain. An evolved doctrine will emphasize the nature of the conflict continuum as fundamentally and primarily a human endeavor, a contest of wills, and identify the activities necessary to position and prepare the Joint Force to contribute to politically

supportable military objectives, enduring outcomes, and national objectives. These activities include shaping and deterrence through the application of political and special warfare approaches.

### **Human Domain**

Winning in the human domain requires its own concepts, concepts that the SOCoE, in conjunction with Combined Arms Center, ARCIC, 1<sup>st</sup> Special Forces Command (Airborne) and the interagency are capable of developing in support of unified land operations. It is from these human domain concepts (the equivalent of "Air Land Battle" for the Land Domain) that doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, and facilities (DOTMLPF) requirements are derived. The Engagement Functional Concept provides the foundation that underpins the human domain. The engagement function consists of the related tasks and systems that influence the behaviors of people, security forces, and governments. This functional concept enables the Army to operate more effectively in the land domain while fully accounting for the human aspects of operations by providing lethal and nonlethal capabilities. Further structural reforms in our Army, SOCOM, Joint Staff, DOD, and the larger interagency are necessary. Winning in the human domain complements joint efforts in the land, air, maritime, space, and cyberspace domains—creating synergy and necessary unity of effort against elusive threats that are increasingly operating in the Gray Zone.

### **Conclusion**

The special forces soldier at the beginning of the article demonstrated the importance and recognized the necessity of special operations

doctrine when he wondered if any of the lessons and best practices learned in Afghanistan would ever be captured for future campaigns. America cannot afford to continue relearning and repeating history in future operating environments. Furthermore, the increasingly complex and uncertain nature of the future environment only reinforces the premise that the United States military must invest in doctrine and strategy to fundamentally change how we develop leaders across the Joint Force and fully embrace the human domain. Doctrine and strategy must facilitate interoperability at all levels to complement and enhance CF and SOF capabilities to effectively address Gray Zone challenges. Future doctrine and strategy must include the human domain and emphasize the interdependence of forces, including interagency partners, into all aspects of leadership education, campaign planning, training, and operations. Future doctrine and strategy should describe how SOF and CF must continue to develop interdependence to improve the Joint Force Commander's ability to execute across the range of military operations by combining the capability and advantages of each force, and maximizing the complementary and collaborative effects of both. Finally, we need to continue momentum to change the rudiments of how we think and talk about warfare and capture it in concepts and doctrine in response to similar challenges. We owe it to our seasoned veterans of the long wars. PRISM

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Maholic Mountain is part of Firebase Maholic, which is named after Master Sergeant Thomas D. Maholic, who was killed in action 24 June 2006 in the Kandahar Province, near Ghecko, Afghanistan when he was fatally struck by enemy small arms fire during a cordon and search mission.

<sup>2</sup> The SFODA, commonly referred to as a detachment or team, is composed of 12 personnel who have undergone a rigorous assessment and selection process to meet the demands of difficult, high-risk, and politically sensitive missions. Each member maintains a high level of proficiency in cultural awareness to include a language capability with expertise in one of the following specialties: operations and intelligence, weapons, medical, communications, and engineering. The SFODA is designed to organize, equip, train, advise or direct, and support indigenous military or paramilitary forces engaged in Unconventional Warfare or Foreign Internal Defense activities. Refer to U.S. Army Field Manual 3-18, Special Forces Operations, dated 28 May 2014 for more information.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph L.Votel, Charles T. Cleveland, and Will Irwin. 2015. "Unconventional War in the Gray Zone." *Joint Forces Quarterly* 80 101 - 109.

<sup>4</sup> The following link provides access to Project Gray: <http://www.projectgray.org/>. National Defense University is hosting the Project Gray Symposium, October 19 – 20, 2016, on Russian Engagement in the Gray Zone at Fort McNair in Washington DC.

<sup>5</sup> As Doctor Hy Rothstein from the Naval Post Graduate School points out in his critique of USSOCOM, Unconventional Warfare in Afghanistan.

<sup>6</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army. 2012. "Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-05, Special Operations." Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, August 31.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, "Military Policy and Defense of the "Grey Areas"" *Foreign Affairs* 33 (3), 1955.

<sup>9</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army. 2012. "Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-05, Special Operations." Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, August 31.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Training and Doctrine Command. 2014. "U.S. Army Functional Concept for Engagement." *Training*

and Doctrine Command Pamphlet 525-8-5. Fort Eustis, VA: Department of the Army, Feb 24.

<sup>12</sup> Special Warfare Magazine. 2013.

"Foundational Concepts for Special Warfare." Special Warfare (Special Operations Center of Excellence, United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School) 26 (2): 16.

<sup>13</sup> United States Army Special Operations Command. 2015. *Explain how ARSOF Alters the Trajectories of Crises. Information Briefing*, Fort Bragg: United States Army Special Operations Command - General Staff 9.

<sup>14</sup> Army Chief of Staff GEN Odierno press briefing. <http://www.defense.gov/News/News-Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/613683>

<sup>15</sup> David Sherfinski, State Dept.: '*Indiscriminate' attacks a measure of success in fight against ISIS*. News, Washington, DC: The Washington Times. Accessed July 6, 2016. <http://m.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/jul/5/state-dept-indiscriminate-attacks-measure-success-/>.

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.arcic.army.mil/app\\_Documents/ARCIC\\_AUSA-Flyer\\_Army-Warfighting-Challenges\\_18MAR15.pdf](http://www.arcic.army.mil/app_Documents/ARCIC_AUSA-Flyer_Army-Warfighting-Challenges_18MAR15.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Special Warfare Magazine. 2013. "ARSOF 2022." Vol. 26. no. 2. Fort Bragg: Special Operations Center of Excellence, United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, April - June.

<sup>18</sup> 1st Special Forces Command (Airborne) Mission Statement

<sup>19</sup> This was outlined in the introduction of the United States Special Operations Command (USASOC) Strategy 2035.

<sup>20</sup> United States Special Operations Command Human Domain Concept, 5 September 2014. See also the United States Army Multi-Domain Concepts being developed by the United States Army Training and Doctrine Command.